



Local Couple Hosts World Cup Ski Jumpers

BY CYNTHIA SEDGWICK
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Intensely dedicated, focused on Olympic gold, training in Park City on the first snow they've seen this year, the Nordic combined team from Belarus competed last Friday and Sunday in the World Cup Nordic competition.

Typically, they would train in Finland before competing, but unfortunately, this year Finland lacked snow.

Sergei Zakharenko, their most experienced athlete, soared into 22nd place with Friday's jump and Sunday's cross country event.

"We have very good athletes so we can still compete, even though we were so short of time to have good practice," affirmed Coach Leonid Chashchin.

He knows they could easily place gold, silver or bronze in the 2002 Olympic Games given enough practice time.

In the 1988 Calgary Olympics, one of his athletes won a bronze medal. At this time Leonid is coaching two athletes — Sergei Zakharenko and Dimitri Schurko. Susan Chashchin, his daughter, is their interpreter.

Zakharenko, now 26-years-old, has been skiing since the age of nine. He wanted to jump, but children in Belarus weren't allowed to jump.

"One day a boy came from Russia. He was a Nordic combined athlete. This boy's father helped the children into Nordic combined," said Sergei.

His parents and 29-year-old sister live in Mogilov, a city about 100 miles east of Minsk.

"Zakharenko is the only person in his family 'who loves sports,'" said Susan. "He participated in the Nagano and Lillehammer Olympic Games and looks forward to the 2002 Games in Utah."

Schurko, after watching others participate in Nordic combined, wanted to prove to himself that he could do it. It is important to him to beat the competition and he began training two years ago. Prior to that he was a dancer.

"He especially enjoyed Latin American dancing," Susan said. "Dimitri has not so much practice, but he loves it very much, as his coach does. My father thought if he will train much he will have success."

Schurko's father is an army officer and his mother a homemaker in Minsk. He also has an older sister and brother.

Lack of snow is the biggest challenge they face. Nordic combined is not a popular sport in Belarus because of this, and consequently, the government does not provide much funding for their program. They do it because they love it!



From left to right: Leonid Chashchin - coach, Dimitri Schurko - athlete, Bob Mathis, Barbara Mathis, Sergei Zakharenko - athlete, and Susan Chashchin - interpreter. These athletes are staying with the Mathis' while they train in Park City and at Soldier Hollow.

Wave photo by Cynthia Sedgwick

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